TOWN & COUNTRY CHURCH

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National Interdenominational Rural Church Programs, 1912-55

An Informal Historical Study

BENSON Y. LANDIS

• This paper will be mainly a concise description of those activities carried on by the Home Missions Council of North America, the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., into which the former two agencies were merged in December, 1950. The period sketched is 1912-55, inclusive. It is recognized that there were forerunners, and other movements of significance during the period, and occasional brief references will be made to these. The main purpose, however, is to document and interpret these national aspects of rural church cooperation begun by the Federal Council and the Home Missions Council.

A forerunner of first importance was the County Work Department of the International Committee of Young Men's Christian Associations, New York. The County Work Department, for example, held a national rural church conference in New York, December, 1910. A committee consisting of Warren H. Wilson, Presbyterian Board of Home Missions; W. L. Anderson, Amherst, Mass.; Edwin L. Earp, Drew Theological Seminary; and D. H. McAlpin of the International Committee of the YMCAs prepared "rules to govern the discussions." These discussions were on: "Teaching Religion in the Country"; "Country Community Building"; "Cooperation and Integration of Country Community Institutions"; "The Function of the Country Church." Among the participants were Kenyon L. Butterfield, Massachusetts Agricultural College; Elias B. Sanford, Corresponding Secretary of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America; G. Walter Fiske, Oberlin College; Elmer O. Fippin, Professor of soil technology, New York College of Agriculture, Cornell University. The Conference was called for the purpose of securing "a consensus of opinion from church leaders and other authorities on country life as to the real function of the church in the country community, its relationship to other organizations, and how there can best be established a basis of cooperation between the church and its supplemental agencies." Over 100 persons attended. A summary of the deliberations was published in a book, *The Rural Church and Community Betterment* (New York, Association Press, 1911).

The County Work Department, Y.M.C.A., published a periodical, *Rural Manhood,* during the years 1910-1923. This contained many articles on the rural church and its relation to community development. The periodical was read by minis-

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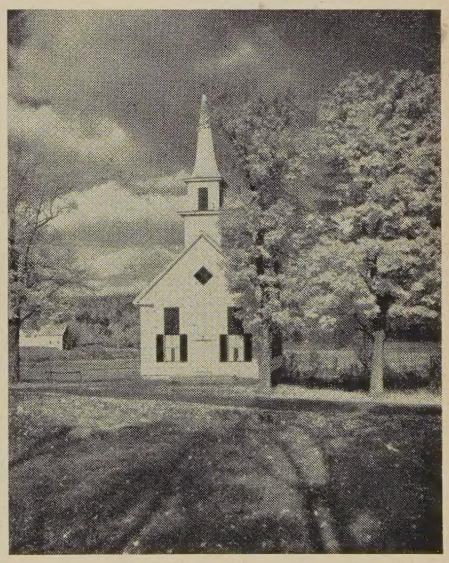

Congregational Church at Eaton Center, N. H.
A. Devaney, Inc., N. Y.

In This Issue

This issue is different. It is almost ntirely devoted to an informal historical udy of National Interdenominational ural Church Programs.

For many years we have been asked for nformation such as is given in this number.

Dr. Benson Y. Landis, who prepared the istorical study is Editor of Research Pubcations for the National Council of hurches' Bureau of Research and Survey.

Dr. Mark Rich, who prepared the hisorical directory of National Denominaonal Departments of Town and Country hurch Work—Pages 13-14—was formerly irector of such work for the American aptist Home Mission Society and now eaches at the Bible College of Missouri, olumbia.

The Department of Town and Country hurch of the National Council of Churches as published in pamphlet form the collecon of articles on American poets which Dr. andis has written for this publication. For urther information about this, see Page 5.

On Pages 14-16 we present "The Gift nd Growth of Unity," by Ralph D. Hyslop, irector of Evangelistic Studies at Union heological Seminary.

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October, 1956

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ters, professors, and students in seminaries and influenced the careers of a number of persons who are mentioned in this study, including the author of this paper.

What Are the Conciliar Functions?

Conciliar means of or pertaining to or issued by a council. It may be useful to list the functions ordinarily performed by councils here, and avoid much duplication later. Councils consist of the elected or appointed representatives of the constituent agencies and institutions. The councils have no authority over the constituencies, indeed do not formally bind the constituents except as the latter may specifically authorize. The individuals who represent constituencies ordinarily act in a dual capacity: 1. They are uninstructed individuals who engage in certain cooperative activities in a council; 2. But they are supposed, as individuals, to convey to the council the wishes of the constituencies they represent. Council actions may thus be vague or specific. They may be the result of carefully prepared information, or of no information.

Councils have been called assemblies of excellent people who can do little in their offices and who come together to decide that little can be done together. On the other hand, councils have at other times been the expression of the determination, the devotion, and the consecration of individuals committed to common tasks deemed of first importance.

The functions most commonly expected of councils are the following:

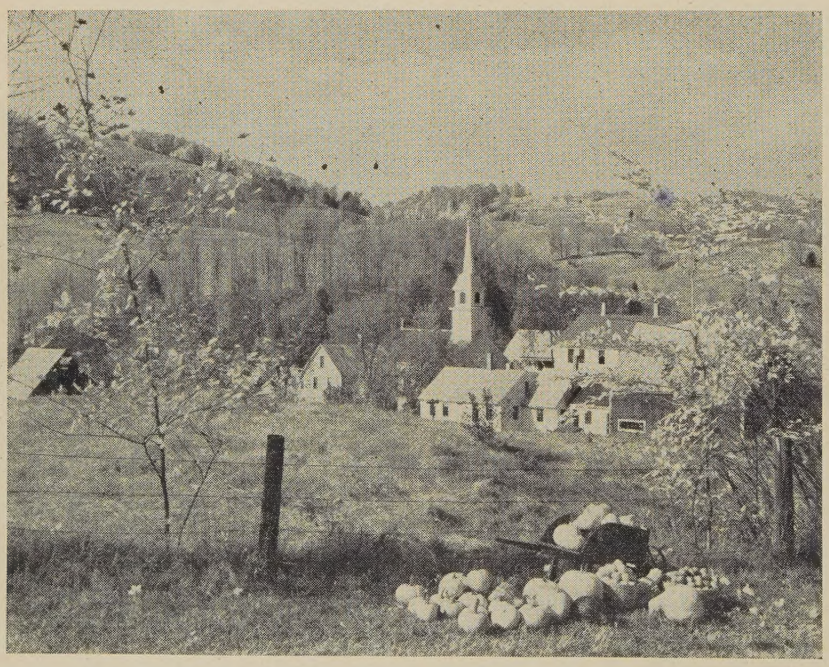
1. The maintenance of contacts among the participating institutions.
2. Informal and formal consultation among representatives of constituent agencies.
3. Promotion of specific cooperative programs and activities on behalf of the constituents.
4. Maintenance of a clearing house of information on subjects of common interest to the constituents.
5. Activities to supplement those of the cooperating organizations.
6. Co-ordination of existing activities of the constituents.
7. Administration of research on subjects of interest to the constituents.
8. Publicity on behalf of cooperative activities.
9. Education of the community with respect to the activities carried on.
10. The performance of certain direct ministries to individuals or local communities, at their request or by agreement among the cooperating denominations.
11. The provision of leadership in matters in which the council has special competence.
12. Possibly others not even encompassed by the long list above.

It is probable that, to one degree or another, all of these functions have been performed by the interdenominational councils here considered.

The early developments in both the H.M.C. and the F.C.C. came to focus in the year 1912. Why this came about cannot be exhaustively dealt with here. It seems probable that there were forces in the denominations that made cooperation desirable. It seems probable that movements of population and the government's recognition of new rural problems were reflected in church circles. It seems probable that there was opinion within the national councils that their activities should not be solely urban, but should also be effective in relation to the large numbers of rural churches and rural people. At any rate we begin with 1912.

The Federal Council's Commission

In 1912, the Commission on the Church and Social Service of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America reported that in the early years of the Council a beginning had been made in the "important work" in the area of "The Country Church and Rural Problems." Rev. George Frederick Wells, a Methodist minister, had served as an assistant to the executive secretary of the Commission, Dr. Charles S. Macfarland. Dr. Macfarland noted that "several" of the 30 constituent bodies had already appointed special committees on country life while other denominations included certain services on behalf of the rural churches under the work of their social service commissions. Note should be taken, Dr. Macfarland said, that the Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., under the pioneering leadership of Dr. Warren H. Wilson, had



Winston Pote from A. Devaney, N.Y.

already "performed a large interdenominational work."

"There is a large opportunity," Dr. Macfarland stated, "to serve as a common body in which the forces now at work would come together and through which relationship the other denominations might receive sympathetic help in developing their work, the Commission serving as a medium by which the possessions of one would be available to all."

"A tentative Committee on Church and Country Life has been appointed, of which Gifford Pinchot is the chairman," Dr. Macfarland reported in 1913. The Committee had 30 members. It had engaged Rev. C. O. Gill, a Congregational rural minister, as field investigator. Mr. Gill spent three months in Europe as a representative of the Federal Council, and also as a member of a voluntary body, the American Commission for the Study of Agricultural Cooperation in Europe. Under the direction of this Committee, a book by Messrs. Gill and Pinchot was written, *The Country Church; the Decline of its Influence and the Remedy,* published by the Macmillan Company, New York, 1913. The book gave reports of studies of the rural churches in Windsor County, Vt., and Tompkins County, N. Y. The work of Warren H. Wilson was again commended.

David W. Corson from A. Devaney, N. Y.

In 1914, in the annual report of the Federal Council, Mr. Gill's report, *Social Effects of Cooperation in Europe,* was published. Mr. Gill claimed that these rural cooperatives promoted thrift, temperance, honesty, independence and self-respect, democracy, political efficiency, peace, brotherhood, and religion.

The Committee became a full-fledged Commission on the Church and Country Life in December, 1914, and so reported in 1915, with C. O. Gill as secretary, and Gifford Pinchot as chairman. Aid was given to the Ohio Rural Life Survey. Henry Wallace, editor of *Wallace's Farmer,* Des Moines, was a member.

President Woodrow Wilson made the closing address at the national conference called by the Commission on the Church and Country Life at Columbus, Ohio, December, 1915. Henry Wallace spoke on "Land Tenure and the Country Church"; Harry F. Ward, on "Social Justice in the Rural Community"; Kenyon L. Butterfield, on "The Function, Policy and Program of the Country Church." The proceedings were edited by Paul L. Vogt, then professor of rural economics and sociology, Ohio State University, and published by the Missionary Education Movement, New York, 1916, under the title, "The Church and Country Life."

The Commission functioned only until 1920, when its functions were assigned to the Commission on the Church and Social Service, which was apparently unable to implement its intentions to render services. In 1920, the Commission on the Church and Country Life reported that C. O. Gill had spent three years surveying the rural churches of Ohio. Gill and Pinchot published the results in another Macmillan book, *Six Thousand Country Churches.* The Commission lost its budget. The H.M.C. and the F.C.C. set up a Joint Committee on War Production Communities. Edmund de S. Brunner, then a minister of the Moravian Church, and for many years secretary of the Moravian Country Church Commission, was made secretary of the Joint Committee. Meanwhile, cooperative events moved rapidly, and the Interchurch World Movement was formed. The staff of the Joint Committee was transferred to the Interchurch World Movement, which conducted an extensive home missions survey with a full-time director in every state. The Interchurch World Movement collapsed in June, 1920. The materials gathered for the

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home missions survey were transferred to the Home Missions Council and to a newly-formed Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, later the Institute of Social and Religious Research. For the next decade the national rural church cooperative program was largely in the care of the Home Missions Council, which had also established a Committee in 1912, whose work is now reviewed. The Federal Council had no Commission in the 1920's.

The Home Missions Council's Approach

The Home Missions Council, organized in 1908, was the beginning of the era of cooperative national home missionary activity. In 1909, a study was made of the situation in Colorado, in close cooperation with the Federal Council. In 1911, there was made "a survey of neglected fields," in states West of the Mississippi River. By 1912 there were 26 constituent boards representing 16 denominations.

The Commission on Country Life appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, which reported in 1909, "gave a new interest to the country church, and challenged the denominations, as nothing else had done, to the importance of the rural church and putting country life work on a new basis." So wrote William R. King in his *History of the Home Missions Council* (New York, undated).

Four members were appointed to the Committee on Rural Fields, set up in 1912: Warren H. Wilson, chairman; I. N. Cash, A. S. Hartman, John M. Moore.

The first report of the Committee on Rural Fields made four recommendations, later approved as policy for the Council:

1. That the Committee on Rural Fields be made a party to whatever rural work is done in behalf of the Home Missions Council.

2. That the Home Missions Council determine the methods of investigation which it shall commend, and on which its studies of the communities shall be based.

3. That a certain region, not smaller than a county, be selected as a proving ground for the country church.

4. That the agricultural colleges be asked to offer mid-winter and mid-summer courses to farmers including moral and religious conditions of the country.

It has been said that Warren H. Wilson and Kenyon L. Butterfield once met at Amherst and worked out an informal plan for "summer schools" for country ministers, actually short courses to supplement their theological seminary training. This was to be in-service training for the minister already on the field. This report cannot be documented at this writing. In 1911, under Presbyterian auspices, Wilson organized three summer schools for pastors in Tennessee, Pennsylvania, and New York. At any rate, Wilson as chairman of the Committee on Rural Fields, was reporting in 1914 that a number of seminaries and state universities had provided "courses in their summer schools for rural ministers." Dr. King records: "Among them were Cornell, Colgate Seminary, Auburn Seminary, Princeton Seminary, University of Tennessee, Peabody School, Iowa State College, University of Arkansas, University of Missouri, University of California."

Three outstanding needs envisaged in these years, as revealed by official reports summed up by Dr. King, were: "A trained country ministry, an adequate country church program, and appropriate buildings and equipment."

"There was a growing desire on the part of the Committee on Rural Fields to have a full-time country life secretary, appointed by the Home Missions Council. . . ." (This goal was to be reached many years after Dr. King wrote.)

During the first decade, in rural work, the emphasis was on "conferences, surveys, schools, institutes."

During World War I the Committee on Rural Fields cooperated with the previously mentioned Joint Committee on War Production Communities (H.M.C. and F.C.C.). Dr. Edmund de S. Brunner, secretary of the Joint Committee, served for a time as secretary of the Rural Fields Committee.

After World War I, the summer school movement developed broadly on an interdenominational basis. In 1920 it could be reported that 21 state agricultural colleges had held such schools for rural pastors who were in some instances accompanied by their wives. The home missions boards began to make grants to assist the pastors attending. One purpose of these schools was reported to be "to give the pastor in a lonely, isolated parish new contacts and inspiration." Other purposes were to increase the efficiency of administration of the local rural church; to introduce pastors to the most "successful" methods used by their brethren; to increase contacts between church and agricultural leaders.

Now comes encouragement of experimental and demonstration work —report for 1924: The denominations are advised to "try out" broad programs of service to an entire community. Among the newer types of demonstration "now under way or under consideration" are:

Employment of directors of religious education for groups of churches.

Organization of religious forces on a county basis.

Missionary work among foreign language people.

Demonstration of church programs in relation to economic welfare.

Experiments in direction of student pastors.

The larger parish plan.

A "Par standard" for the local church was adopted by the Committee in 1926. This consisted of a long list of desirable goals which the congregation should strive to reach, under such heads as physical equipment, finance, meetings, religious education, ministry, program, cooperation. The standard of 1926 was arranged in three forms: A. for the small church; B. for the church with limited means; C. for the church with "considerable" means and leadership. The "Par standard" was published in pamphlet form and widely distributed.

There was a "Par standard" before this one. Its precise origin is ob-

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Town & Country Church

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Contributors of articles to TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH speak for themselves and not for the National Council of Churches or sponsoring organizations.

Purposes of This Journal

The purposes of this Journal are:

A. To encourage cooperation among rural churches.

B. To improve the administration of the local church, this to include organization of the church, finance, religious education, community relationships, and the training of lay leadership.

C. To stimulate the development of a Christian philosophy of rural life, this to embrace ethical issues in agriculture, social reconstruction, and government programs; and the content of the minister's message.

Part of Larger Program

The Journal is an important part of an enlarged "cooperative rural church program" that will encourage a national "rural church movement."

Benson Y. Landis

"Poetry and Rural Life"

• The series of articles by Benson Y. Landis on American poets with rural and religious accents is being published, in response to a number of requests, in permanent form—a booklet by the Department of Town and Country Church at 50 cents a copy. Sixteen articles among some twenty-five that have appeared or will appear in this journal are printed in the booklet. It includes the article on "Hymns from the Country."

As one would perhaps expect, the booklet opens with one of Dr. Landis' numerous studies of Robert Frost, a poet now read and admired everywhere, who insists on telling his audiences that poetry is more often of the country than the city.

Attention is then given to Vachel Lindsay and his Village of God; Walt Whitman, known generally as the good gray poet of democracy; Carl Sandburg, the Lincoln of our poets who is also a student and interpreter of Lincoln; Robert P. Tristram Coffin who wrote about Maine in a universal language.

Also, to Riley and his Indiana; Edwin Markham's social and religious passion; Edwin Arlington Robinson's poems about his home town; the poems of Liberty Hyde Bailey who was also one of our great

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scientists and rural educational administrators; the Iowa farmer, James Hearst, and his country men; John Niehardt's distinctly American verse.

Also, to the poetry of John Burroughs, Henry David Thoreau, William Cullen Bryant, and John Greenleaf Whittier.

The whole series is an avocational interest. It was "unplanned," Dr. Landis asserts, simply growing out of personal readings and expressions. Recently Dr. Landis, a layman, was much gratified to learn that a group of rural ministers had been studying these writings and that they concluded they were materials that helped them to communicate their message.

The introduction quotes Edwin Arlington Robinson as saying that poetry is both undefinable and unmistakable. And it has also been remarked that if a thing is definable it is not poetry. Dr. Landis finds in poetry certain unmistakable reasons for interpreting the aspirations of these writers to people interested in the rural community and the churches in those communities.

Rural Church Programs

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scure. There was also much discussion of the name, some of it in lighter tone. There was a "Par standard" in circulation in the days of the Interchurch World Movement, which also was apparently approved by the Committee on Town and Country (the new name) of the Home Missions Council. In the period 1919-20, the "Par standard" was submitted to a large group of survey workers of the Interchurch World Movement representing every state of the union. There was unanimous agreement among the survey workers that the "Par standard" should be placed before the country churches of America, not as an ideal beyond accomplishment but as a goal which most churches might reasonably attain. It was undoubtedly a teaching device of importance. In the 1950's there was a revival of the standard, and versions of it were reprinted by the home mission agencies of the Congregational Christian Churches, the Evangelical and Reformed Church, and other bodies.

The H.M.C. entered on an "enlarged program" in 1918, and this included a great deal of attention to problems of comity and cooperation. Cooperation was given by officers of denominational boards to the active Interdenominational Commission of Maine, under the leadership of Alfred Williams Anthony; and the Massachusetts Federation of Churches, with E. Tallmadge Root as secretary.

In 1918, too, the Committee on Comity recommended an "Every Community Service Endeavor." The first state to put on this program was Montana, and agreements were made among nine denominations for the adequate churching of the state. Steps were taken to deal with both over-churched and under-churched communities. Plans had been made for a similar study and procedure for other states, but were disrupted by the collapse, in 1920, of the Interchurch World Movement. After that Movement ceased operations, teams of national home mission executives made systematic visits to and held comity conferences in Idaho, California, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming, and North Dakota. There was reported much opinion in favor of "concerted advance in unchurched and over-churched communities in order to provide adequately equipped churches in small places."

"Comity Principles . . . in Town and Country Fields" were adopted by the H.M.C. and submitted to constitutional boards for approval. This plan of comity was endorsed by "several" of the boards, Dr. King reported, and "cordially received by others." It declared that "for English-speaking work," among other items:

"A field shall be regarded as adequately occupied when for each 1,000 population, homogeneous as to language and color and reasonably accessible from a given point, there is at present one church meeting at least the following minimum standard of service and equipment:

"Resident pastor devoting full time to the work of the ministry.

"Public worship every Sabbath.

"Sunday school meeting regularly.

"Edifice reasonably adequate to needs of the community for worship, religious training, and service."

Such church, to deserve exclusive occupancy of a field "will receive in Christian fellowship all varieties of evangelical Christians without subjecting them to doctrinal or other tests which do not accord with the standards of their respective faiths."

The statement also declared principles with respect to over-churching and competition; good procedures for initiating new enterprises; and situations in which competition was held to be particularly unjustifiable.

A revision of these principles, stated in somewhat more positive terms, was made in 1950, entitled "Churching the Rural Community Cooperatively." This was approved by the Commission on Comity Principles at the National Convocation on the Church in Town and Country, November, 1949, and by the National Congress on Home Missions, January, 1950. It was printed in the periodical, TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH, October, 1950, and also reprinted.

The third decade of the H.M.C., opening in 1928, was marked by a national Church Comity Conference held at Cleveland, Ohio, January, 1928. Over 400 delegates studied important aspects of comity in a thorough-going way. A body of findings was adopted, including a section, Cooperation in Rural America. It had long been recognized that "much" of the comity problem was in rural areas. The most significant outcome of the Comity Conference was the Five Year Program of Survey & Adjustment, carried on under a Committee, of which Hermann N. Morse, Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., was chairman. Dr. Morse had been an associate of Warren H. Wilson's. Dr. Morse directed extensive studies and surveys which were, in turn, reported to the Home Missions Congress in 1930. He served the H.M.C. for a time as part-time director of surveys.

"Rural Life Sunday" was suggested as a new name for Rogation Sunday, the 5th Sunday after Easter, by Rev. H. W. Foreman of the Protestant Episcopal Church in 1929. He first took his suggestion to the International Association for Agricultural Missions, which, apparently, asked the Home Missions Council to prepare materials to aid persons wishing to observe the day. Dr. W. R. King, executive secretary of the H.M.C., accepted the responsibility for circulating the first materials, largely prepared by Mr. Foreman. Endorsement of the idea was given by President Hoover; Secretary of Agriculture Hyde; and governors of various states. Since those early years the Committee on Town and Country has prepared an annual leaflet to aid in the observance. The Rogation Days have been observed since about 450 A.D. They were originally days of prayer for the crops in the fields and for the workers in the fields. These latter years the annual announcement has asked for attention to the significance of rural life for Christianity, and the significance of Christianity for rural life. The day has been well observed in many rural churches, and also in a few urban churches. Here and there, farm organizations have attended the services, and rural and urban ministers have exchanged pulpits.

Leaders of the Committee on Town and Country continued to promote in-service training for rural ministers. They cooperated in the formation of two developments in New England: In 1929, the organization of the New England Town and Country Church Commission, for the encouragement of cooperation among the rural church forces in the region; in the same year, the formation of the Interseminary Commission for Training for the Rural Ministry, to serve five theological seminaries in the region. At this time Malcolm Dana, Congregational Churches, was chairman of the Committee; Ralph S. Adams, Reformed Church in the U.S.A., was secretary. Dr. Dana began to teach at Hartford and Yale; Mr. Adams at Bangor; C. M. McConnell at Boston and Newton.

The Committee Becomes Joint

In 1931, the Administrative Committees of both the H.M.C. and the F.C.C. approved a short document outlining a simple method of procedure whereby the Committee on Town and Country became a joint one serving both councils. Administration of the Committee was the responsibility of H.M.C., but on specific projects the Committee might refer matters to both councils, and, with their permission, function for both. The membership of the Committee was enlarged to include persons named by the F.C.C. Proposed publications were to be submitted to both councils. The Committee would report annually to both councils. In the same year Professor Ralph S. Adams, of Bangor Theological Seminary, resigned, and Benson Y. Landis, associate secretary of the Federal Council's Department of Research and Education was named secretary. The Committee had no budget, and Mr. Landis' part-time services were provided by the Federal Council. The annual report for 1932 said that the economic depression had seriously affected rural church life and had made interchurch cooperation more necessary than previously. Promotion of Rural Life Sunday and of summer schools were the main projects of the Joint Committee, which also had a special interest in the various field efforts for comity and adjustment.

A Decade of Voluntary Cooperation

During roughly the next decade, the Committee carried on only such projects as could be carried on by voluntary cooperation, with occasional expenditures from the central budget of H.M.C. Among the more extensive activities were the following:

A national conference on the country church held in Washington, D. C., January, 1936, in connection with the annual sessions of the Home Missions Council and the Council of Women for Home Missions, and convened under the auspices of both. The emphasis was on a review of the situation, and on the need for a cooperative approach. H. N. Morse prepared comprehensive findings which were adopted. They were published in full in *Information Service,* February 29, 1936. The general theme was: "The Rural Church Today and Tomorrow."

A somewhat more specialized national conference was convened under the same auspices, November, 1936, on the theme: "The Church and the Agricultural Situation." T. W. Schultz spoke on "Understanding the Economics of Agriculture"; E. L. Morgan, on "What is Social Planning?" M. A. Dawber, on "The Contribution of the Church to a Philosophy of Economic Cooperation." The influence of Dr. Dawber, as the director of rural church programs of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was at this time a cumulative one, and soon thereafter, 1937, he was named executive secretary of the H.M.C., following the illness and retirement of W. R. King.

The Joint Committee had a special interest in the conference on "Home Missions and Social Trends," held in Baltimore, 1939, as part of the annual meeting of the two missions councils. Katherine E. Gladfelter, of the Board of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., spoke on "Home Missions and Cooperatives." Will W. Alexander of the Farm Security Administration made a plea that the churches should speak for the landless people of the nation who had no effective spokesman. Dr. Alexander's fervent plea was roundly applauded, but apparently never widely implemented.

Generous cooperation was given to the New England Town and Country Church Commission and the New England Inter-Seminary Commission in the holding of a regional conference at Keene, N. H., May, 1938, on "The Religious Situation in New England." The Conference was preceded by fact-finding on the part of the region's rural church leaders. George D. Aiken, then governor of Vermont, spoke on "The Significance of Rural Life to New England." Don Scanlon spoke on "Religion, Economics, and Fishermen." A section of the program was on "Aspects of Social Welfare."

"A National Program for the Rural Church" was adopted by a Con-

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ference called by the Committee, January, 1938, in New York, the purpose being to clarify further the findings of the Washington Conference held two years earlier, and to decide the most important "next steps." The Conference brought out a 16 page pamphlet, which covered most aspects of the work of the local church, cooperation on the part of the church with other agencies. A great deal of good advice was given to theological seminaries, urging them to improve their specialized training for the rural ministry.

Turning Points in 1943

In 1943, the cooperation begun between H.M.C. and F.C.C. in 1931 was more formally established, and Mr. Landis was assigned by F.C.C. to give half his time to the Joint Committee on Town and Country, administered for both Councils by H.M.C. In 1944, the International Council of Religious Education approved the agreement, and thus became a sponsor. Opinion developed among the denominational executives that the program should be expanded to include a convocation, a periodical, and more systematic field service. A modest budget was provided by cooperating boards. Grants of over $4,200 were made to permit the employment of an office secretary, and with this sum the national movement was to be expanded!

The first convocation was held at Columbus, Ohio, in September, 1943, a war year, with travel restricted, but over 450 persons, mainly ministers, attended. The denominations were responsible for assembling their delegations, but the meeting was an informal one, open to "anyone interested" in the town and country church. Immediately it was decided that the convocation should be held annually.

The monthly periodical, TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH, was begun as an eight-page paper at $1.00 a year. Some 2,100 persons paid for it in advance. Some thought this was a miraculous result; others, with different points of view, thought we were pikers.

The Committee's program soon included rather extensive informal consultation with such as the United States Department of Agriculture, the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, state colleges of agriculture, and other units of the councils. The Committee worked at its task directly on the main aspects of its program. It was also ready to work indirectly, with others, and rejoiced when units with more general responsibilities in the three councils undertook some rural church services.

National Council Arrangements, 1950-55

The Planning Committee that facilitated the merger of the numerous interdenominational agencies into the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., in Cleveland, in 1950, took note of the developments in home missions, as elsewhere.

Rules of procedure were adopted for a Town & Country Church Department in the Division of Home Missions, which was a continuation of the Home Missions Council. The Committee on Sharecropper Work was transferred to the Department and was renamed the Extension Unit, carrying on the same program as previously, with a field staff. The nature of this program is described in another section of this study.

Benson Y. Landis and Don F. Pielstick were elected co-executive directors, each to give half time to the work. Mr. Pielstick had joined the staff of the Council in 1942 and had given part of his time to Town and Country Work since 1945. Mr. Pielstick was a minister of the American Baptist Convention. He had been largely responsible for the Town and Country field services. His untimely death in 1955 removed from the department an ecumenical worker with broad experience. Mr. Landis served the department through 1952, when Mr. Pielstick was made full-time executive director.

The 1954 report of the Department of Town & Country Church made mention of the following:

Publication of leaflets to aid in the observance of Rural Life Sunday, begun in 1929, and of Harvest Festivals, begun in 1943.

Cooperation with a "great variety" of in-service training projects.

The Extension Unit, continuing to carry on training among pastors of sharecroppers and other low-income farm families.

The Committee on Land Tenure continuing its production of the book, *"The Church and the Family Farm,"* scheduled for publication by the department in 1956.

A recently appointed Committee on Churching of People in Sparsely Settled Areas announcing an informal study and plans for a conference, held in 1955.

The periodical, TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH, continuing to be published monthly, nine times a year emphasizing program methods in the local church (also separately described).

The National Convocation, held annually—see another section for a more comprehensive report.

In 1955, Rev. Richard O. Comfort was elected executive director to succeed the late Don F. Pielstick. Dr. Comfort came to the executive leadership after experience in the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., as pastor, educator, and administrator.

Literature

The Joint Committee constantly encouraged others to publish in its own field, often assisted in the preparation of materials, and did what it could to call attention to important literature. *Examples* of publications of this type (except for missionary education, dealt with below) were the following:

Studies of the Institute of Social and Religious Research, N.Y.

Lectures on "The Church and the Agricultural Crisis," delivered by Edmund de S. Brunner, in Chicago, 1927, on the Alden Tuthill Foundation, published by Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1928.

The Pamphlet Library on Worship, brought out by the Federal Council's Commission on Worship; notably "Rural Life Prayers," compiled by Mark Rich, 1941, and "Country Altars," by Edward K. Ziegler, 1942.

In the Social Progress Series, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian

Church in the U.S.A., a discussion guide, "American Rural Life: A Christian Concern," by Benson Y. Landis.

Compilation of Pronouncements by Official Protestant Agencies, "The Social Ideals of the Churches for Agriculture and Rural Life," by Benson Y. Landis, published by the Christian Rural Fellowship, Bulletin 73, June, 1942.

The Felton Pamphlets, as they have been popularly and not inaccurately called. Among Ralph Felton's contributions to the rural church movement was the writing of a long list of pamphlet materials, many titles of which carried the imprint of or were distributed by H.M.C. The following are representative of a longer list:

"Local Church Cooperation in Rural Communities," undated.

"The Salary of Rural Pastors," 1946.

"The Lord's Acre," 1946.

"The Church Bus," 1946.

"A Hundred Games for Rural Communities," undated.

"The Size of the Rural Parish," 1946.

"The Church Farm," 1946.

A Town & Country Cooperative Series of Pamphlets, begun in 1942, included the following, distributed by H.M.C.:

"The Minister's Use of the Weekly Newspaper," by Mark Rich.

"The Rural Aspects of a Just and Durable Peace," by C. M. McConnell.

Church Cooperation Series, sponsored by the Inter-Council Field Department, including, 1945, one "Churching the Community Cooperatively," which had a chapter on rural areas.

"United Local Churches," by H. Paul Douglass, undated, distributed by H.M.C. and F.C.C., being an interpretation illustrated by case studies.

A symposium, "Religious Education in Rural America," published in *Religious Education,* March-April, 1945.

"Hymns of the Rural Spirit," 1947, published by the Commission on Worship, F.C.C., and maintained in print by the National Council.

Two annually published leaflets, "An Order of Service for Rural Life Sunday," and "An Order of Service for a Harvest Festival," both now published by the Department of Town and Country Church, have been published as an aid to the minister. The first was begun in 1929, the second in 1943.

Sharecropper Work—Extension Unit

In the H.M.C. the work of a Committee on Sharecropper Work was begun in 1940. The Committee employed field workers, under Ralph A. Felton, of Drew Theological Seminary, who, in H.M.C., became director of training of Negro rural pastors. In 1942, schools for rural pastors and institutes for rural church women were held, attended by 300 persons; in 1943, 600 persons; in 1944, 1,223 persons. The total cost of the program was some $6,000 that year.

By 1947, with the aid of special foundation grants, the program was much expanded. During that year 37 rural church institutes were conducted directly by the Committee, or through cooperation with other agencies. These institutions were attended by almost 1,500 persons, mostly pastors.

Sixteen extension classes were conducted with a total registration of 271 persons. Most of these met regularly, September-May, permitting 29 to 30 sessions per class. Registrations per class varied from 7 to 30. Four courses of study were offered per class.

Practical workshops were conducted throughout the year, in connection with extension classes. One was on the subject of low-cost construction. Another dealt with methods of conducting rural worship services; still another on methods of daily vacation Bible schools. The Committee on Sharecropper Work cooperated in an interracial project in improving the rural church centering at Warren H. Wilson College, Swannanoa, N.C.

During 1947, the Committee established a center for rural reconstruction in Puerto Rico. Rev. Richard E. Johnson, who had received special training in agriculture, conducted institutes for rural ministers. A property was purchased as a home for the director.

In the year 1950, as before said, the administration of the sharecropper work was committed to the Committee on Town and Country. The executive responsibility was given to the Rev. Don F. Pielstick who had joined the staff of H.M.C. in 1942, and who began serving the Committee on Town and Country on a part-time basis in the year 1945.

Land Tenure and the Family Farm

One of the most active subcommittees has been the one on Land Tenure, which began operations in 1940, and has functioned with assistance from the Farm Foundation, Chicago, since that date. The first committee consisted of the Rev. M. R. Zigler, Church of the Brethren, chairman; A. H. Rapking, the Methodist Church; Paul L. Vogt, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Consultants were Joseph Ackerman, Farm Foundation, and Marshall Harris, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U.S.D.A. The Committee held several regional conferences on the Church and Land Tenure, attended by economists, sociologists, farmers, country pastors, church officials.

"How can the churches help to improve rural communities by creating more stable conditions of farm tenure than now prevail?" This question was put to about 150 persons in regional seminars. It was said that rural opinion rejects tenancy—rural people wish to have farm property widely distributed and so far as possible under the immediate supervision of its owners. It was said that the churches were adversely affected by the instability that went with a high degree of tenancy. The churches should promote the family farm because it made for stability and gave the churches an opportunity to create a Christian fellowship that would not otherwise be possible.

The subcommittee conducted discussions at the annual convocations and produced a book, *The Church and the Family Farm,* by Messrs. Ackerman and Harris, early in 1956.

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Research

The records indicate that the Town and Country Unit encouraged much research, but actually did relatively little directly during the forty-three years under review. Warren H. Wilson made some of the earliest—if not the first—community studies to be made by churchmen. As a graduate student at Columbia University he wrote a dissertation, *Quaker Hill* (1907), a study of a community near Pawling, N.Y. In the Board of Home Missions, Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., Wilson, Hermann N. Morse, Ralph A. Felton, and others, made a number of studies. C. O. Gill, for the Federal Council, made, as before noted, studies of country churches in Ohio, New York, and Vermont.

The Committee had an alert interest in the surveys of the Interchurch World Movement, the Committee on Social and Religious Surveys, the Institute of Social and Religious Research, and in the research done by the Federal Council's departments. Probably the members of the Committee read these researches and encouraged rural pastors to use them. The Committee also followed the general studies of home mission situations made by Dr. Morse for H.M.C.

Since 1944, the Committee has participated in the program of the Committee for Cooperative Field Research, initiated by the F.C.C., the H.M.C., and a group of denominational research departments which in that year engaged H. Paul Douglass as director. Dr. Douglass made many studies, supervised others, and encouraged still more. The results of his rural church studies were summarized in a special issue of Town and Country Church, January, 1950.

The Committee on Cooperative Field Research became the Field Research unit of the National Council's Department of Research and Survey, December, 1950.

Man's Relation to the Land

At times friendly and informal contacts have been maintained with officials of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, Des Moines, Iowa, particularly during the administration of the Right Rev. Msgr. L. G. Ligutti. Msgr. Ligutti invited the Protestant officials responsible for rural church program to attend the annual meeting of the Roman Catholic conference held at Peoria in 1942.

A much publicized statement, "Man's Relation to the Land," was signed in 1945 by 75 Jews, Roman Catholics, and Protestants. Its formulation was initiated by Msgr. Ligutti. The statement, published later by Roman Catholic and Protestant agencies, contained common "principles which shall underlie our national, state, and individual actions." It was printed in the U.S. *Congressional Record* and continues to be discussed from time to time.

When the annual National Convocation on the Church in Town & Country was held in Des Moines, in 1946, Msgr. Ligutti was invited to address the assembly twice, as a sort of return of the courtesy he had extended to Protestant officials in Peoria earlier.

Catholic writings on rural life have been consistently reviewed in the periodical, Town and Country Church. A document often consulted by Protestants is the Roman Catholic compilation, "Rural Manifesto" (Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee). This brings together Roman Catholic teachings on rural life.

Seminar on Theology and Rural Life

The National Council's Department of Town and Country Church assembled, in 1955, a series of mimeographed reports of an exploratory seminar on "Christian Theology and Rural Life," organized informally in 1953 and 1954, by Thomas Alfred Tripp and Benson Y. Landis. The seminar heard persons who interpreted theologies in rural terms; others who had studied rural communities; still others who had made syntheses of theology and rural social thought. The papers were distributed in a bound folder, largely to teachers of the rural church in seminaries and to boards of home missions.

International Cooperation

Over the years there have been informal contacts with the responsible agencies promoting cooperation in rural missions and the rural church in other lands. Thus, from time to time, conference was had with Agricultural Missions, Inc., under the leadership of John H. Reisner and Ira Moomaw. This agency recently celebrated the completion of 25 years of work.

One of the projects carried out with the Rural Missions Cooperating Committee of the Foreign Missions Conference, the Farm Foundation, and Agricultural Missions, was the convening in 1946, in New York, of an international conference attended by 37 persons on land tenure and related conditions throughout the world. The deliberations were published by Agricultural Missions, New York, 1949, under the title, "Agrarian Reform and Moral Responsibility."

Also significant was the Committee's role in participating in an international conference on the church and rural life held at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches, Bossey, Switzerland, in August, 1953. This session proved to be of interest to rural church leaders throughout the world, to the extent that the Institute planned a second session for 1956, which 20 Americans expect to attend.

Several persons on the Committee of the National Council's Department of Town and Country Church took part in the formulation of an international statement, Christian Concerns in regard to Food and Agriculture, adopted by the Executive Committee of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, in 1952.

The Convocation Re-Appraised

In 1953, after the Convocation had been held for ten years, a "Decade Committee" was appointed under the chairmanship of Alice Maloney, Board of National Missions, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., to restudy the experience. The Convocation was held for several purposes, reflected in the emphases of the program, summarized below. Its purpose was not rigidly defined at the outset, and there was always a regional flavor to all the gatherings.

The addresses before general sessions apparently had the following purposes:

To provide a rally of the friends of the rural church.

To explore outstanding issues, e.g., those on land tenure and family farming.

To highlight a concern, e.g., relief needs.

To serve the interests of a region, e.g., planning in the Columbia Valley and the Missouri Valley.

To present new information, e.g., about trends in agriculture.

To tell how people did successful work, e.g., in local parishes.

To outline the rural church's comprehensive tasks.

The commissions, on subjects too numerous to detail here, have provided, primarily, for intensive discussion in small groups of methods found good in the local church. They have probably been mainly concerned with the administration of the local church, church cooperation, and cooperation of the church with other agencies, religious education.

There appears to be good reason for holding the Convocation annually, and this was the practice when this study was concluded.

Policy on Rural Economic and Social Relations

The Committee on Town and Country and the Department of Town and Country have never been pronouncing bodies. Indeed, they have left resolutions on society and its reconstruction to other agencies of the churches, most of which have been vocal. One basic reason for this situation may be that the voting members are mainly representatives of boards of home missions, which themselves take no positions. Another factor may have been the personalities involved—their theories of work may have been such as to put a low value on pronouncements. (This is in striking contrast to the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, which passes many resolutions.)

An important document to note in this study is "A Protestant Policy on Rural Economic and Social Relations," 1950. This was a comprehensive statement of recommended policy, first prepared by a subcommittee of the Committee on Town and Country, then revised by a Conference called for the purpose, and finally approved by a commission of the Convocation held at Lincoln, Nebr., 1949. It was then printed in TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH, and "presented to the churches for study."

It included such subjects as social welfare, farm labor, development of river valleys, decentralization, the family, the community. It declared: "Rural life today is more dynamic than ever before."

The Periodical, Town & Country Church

When the periodical, TOWN AND COUNTRY CHURCH, was begun in 1943, the declared purpose was to link it closely with the Convocation. It has also been observed that from time immemorial every movement has had to have its own periodical. The paper has, like the Convocation, served various purposes.

It has reviewed all important books on the rural church, and many on rural life.

It has noted most of the pamphlet literature.

It has provided a forum for dissemination of ideas and exploration of issues.

It has printed a limited amount of news about town and country church developments.

Most of all, it has given space to the rural pastor in the local community who tells about what he is doing and how.

It has dealt with many personalities, including a group of poets who have displayed both rural and religious accents.

It has interpreted certain government programs, e.g., those in conservation.

It has described numerous types of cooperation between churches and community agencies.

The periodical was edited by Benson Y. Landis, with the assistance of Ruth B. Robinson, from 1946 on. In 1953, Mrs. Robinson was appointed editor. These latter years the paper, under her leadership, has revealed a vigorous editorial policy, presenting lively and well-balanced materials.

Missionary Education

The Department of Town and Country Church and its predecessor have continuously cooperated in the production and distribution of the literature on missionary education, published by the Missionary Education Movement, now the Joint Commission on Missionary Education, National Council of Churches.

Among the titles in which rural church executives have had a special interest are:

"The Church of the Open Country," by Warren H. Wilson, 1911. "A study of the church for the working farmer."

"The Church and Country Life," Edited by Paul L. Vogt, 1916. A report of a national conference, described above under F.C.C.

"The New Country Church Building," by Edmund de S. Brunner, 1917.

"Our Templed Hills," by Ralph A. Felton, 1926.

"The Rural Billion," by C. M. McConnell, 1931.

"The Story of Agricultural Missions," by B. H. Hunnicutt and William W. Reid, 1931.

"Highland Heritage," by E. E. White, 1937.

"Rebuilding Rural America," by Mark A. Dawber, 1937.

"Rural Americans on the Move," by Thomas Alfred Tripp, 1945.

"America's Changing Frontiers," by Mark A. Dawber, 1945.

"Rural Prospect," by Mark Rich, 1950.

"Hope Rises From the Land," by Ralph A. Felton, 1955. Stories of what agricultural missionaries do.

Intermountain Area

Beginning January 1, 1954, responsibility for administering the work of the Intermountain Area was vested in the Department of Town and Country Church. An Intermountain Committee had functioned for many years with cooperative functions for the constituency concerned with that part of the nation which

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is under the dominant influence of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, popularly known as Mormonism. This area includes Utah, Western Wyoming, Colorado, Eastern Nevada, and Southern Idaho.

In 1951 a study of the area was made for the Intermountain Committee by David W. Barry and Ross W. Sanderson. This indicated that a strong united effort representing all constituent denominations would be very fruitful. The difficulties have been that the churches of the area are basically mission-aided; that each denomination is reluctant to share its meager support with an interdenominational agency; that each is also reluctant to have a special appeal made to the churches of the region to support interdenominational work. Ways and means of initiating interdenominational work have been explored.

Limitations of This Study

This study has been completed under severe limitations. It is made by a participant-observer, who has himself been involved with much that has gone on. His memory goes back almost to the beginnings of the period under review. He has known almost all the personalities mentioned.

Before writing the paper, the author decided to make it mainly a narrative of institutional activity. Mention has been made, it is believed, of every person who was an officer of the Committee. But many members who took part could not be noted in the space available. Also, references to individuals have been kept at a minimum. It was not possible, in the time available, to appraise adequately any of the persons mentioned herein. Possibly later a more adequate treatment, with full justice to many persons, can be had.

Finally it is noted that the present generation of rural church program specialists is not fully recognized. The time available was given to a search of records of a more remote era. And, it is hoped that the salients of a movement have here been to some extent delineated, so that they at least become the basis or the starting point for a more skillful historian.

The following persons have served as chairmen of the Committee on Town and Country and, since 1950, of the Department of Town and Country Church:

List of Officers

1912-18	Warren H. Wilson, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
1919-20	Paul L. Vogt, Methodist Episcopal Church
1921	David D. Forsyth, Methodist Episcopal Church
1922-24	Paul L. Vogt, Methodist Episcopal Church
1925-35	Malcolm Dana, Congregational Christian Churches
1936	Mark A. Dawber, Methodist Episcopal Church
1937-38	M. R. Zigler, Church of the Brethren
1939-40	Thomas Alfred Tripp, Congregational Christian Churches
1941-42	Mark Rich, American Baptist Convention
1943-44	Clifford L. Samuelson, Protestant Episcopal Church
1945-46	Henry S. Randolph, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.
1947-48	Edwin L. Becker, Disciples of Christ
1949-50	Elliott L. Fisher, The Methodist Church
1951-52	Claude J. Snyder, Evangelical and Reformed Church
1953-54	George P. Kerr, United Presbyterian Church
1955-56	Henry S. Randolph, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

(This list does not include officers of the Federal Council's Commission, 1912-20.)

Secretaries have been:

Edmund de S. Brunner, 1919-25
Ralph S. Adams, 1926-30
Benson Y. Landis, 1930-50 (part-time)
Don F. Pielstick, 1945-55 (part-time, 1945-52; full-time 1953-55)
Richard O. Comfort, 1955-

Announcement Regarding

the 1956

Convocation on the Church in Town and Country

The Place and Time: St. Louis, Missouri, October 16-18.

Registration Fee: A registration fee of $2.00 will be charged to help carry the expense of the Convocation. This is paid when you register at the Centenary Methodist Church, Sixteenth and Pine Streets.

Who May Attend: Everyone interested in the town and country church. For hotel reservations, write directly the Claridge, Warwick, or Jefferson hotels. For rooms in homes, make application to your denominational executive of town and country church work. Requests must be received by them before October 4.

Historical Directory of National Denominational Departments of Town and Country Church Work

BAPTIST

American Baptist Convention

American Baptist Home Mission Society
164 Fifth Avenue
New York 10, N.Y.

Department of Town and Country Work, established November 1, 1919.

Secretaries:
- Dr. Rolvix Harlan, November 1919-1922
- Dr. L. C. Barnes, 1922-1926 (part-time with general mission supervision)
- Dr. Frank A. Smith, 1926-1929 (part-time with general mission supervision)
- Dr. Edwin E. Sundt, 1929-1933 Director of Rural and Village Work
- Rev. Ellsworth M. Smith, 1936-1938
- Dr. Mark Rich, 1938-1952
- Rev. J. H. Heartberg, 1952- (jointly with ministry to service men)

National Baptist Convention, U.S.A.

Home Mission Board
4501 Vincennes Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Rural Church Commission; Established 1953

Chairman:
- Rev. E. F. Black, 1953-

Southern Baptist Convention

Home Mission Board
161 Spring Street, N.W.
Atlanta 3, Georgia

Established January, 1944

Assistant to Executive Secretary:
- Dr. Courts Redford, 1944-1947
- Dr. S. F. Dowis, 1947-
- Rev. J. T. Gillespie, Director Rural Church Program, 1955-

CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

Ministry and Home Mission Commission within the General Brotherhood Board, 22 South State Street, Elgin, Illinois

Responsibility for rural church leadership lodged with general executive. (No department of rural church)

Established (about) 1927

Executives:
- Dr. M. R. Zigler, 1927-1942
- Dr. H. L. Hartsough, 1942-1948 (Dr. Ira Moomaw served as "rural life secretary" for the Church of the Brethren during the 1940's)
- Dr. Charles E. Zunkel, 1948- (Dr. Edward K. Ziegler combined rural work with his responsibility for evangelism from the late 1940's until 1955)

CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Town and Country Department
Board of Home Missions
287 Fourth Avenue
New York 10, N.Y.

Established, October, 1919

Secretaries:
- Dr. Malcolm L. Dana, 1919-1937
- Dr. Thomas Alfred Tripp, 1937-1954
- Dr. Wesley A. Hotchkiss, 1954-

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

Department of Rural Work

United Christian Missionary Society
222 South Downey Avenue
Indianapolis 7, Indiana

Established, March 9, 1943

National Directors:
- Rev. Edwin L. Becker, August 1944-September 1950
- Rev. Dale W. Medearis, September 1950-

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Division of Town and Country

National Council
281 Fourth Avenue
New York 10, N.Y.

Established 1924 as division for Rural Work under Department of Missions and Christian Social Service. Division abolished 1934. Re-established under assistant secretary in Department of Domestic Missions.

Secretaries:
- Rev. Fred D. Goodwin, 1924-1926
- Rev. Harry W. Foreman, 1926-1930
- Rev. C. Rankin Barnes, 1930 (Executive Secretary, Department of Christian Social Relations)
- Rev. Goodrich R. Fenner, 1932-1934
- Rev. Clifford L. Samuelson, 1941-

EVANGELICAL AND REFORMED CHURCH

Department of Town and Country Church

Board of National Missions
1720 Chouteau Avenue
St. Louis 3, Missouri

Established, 1922, Reformed Church in the U.S. Discontinued during early depression. Re-established in a committee in 1941 after union of Reformed Church in the U.S. and the Evangelical Synod of North America.

Secretaries:
- Ralph S. Adams, 1922-1929
- Claude J. Snyder, 1945-

EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN CHURCH

Commission on Town and Country Work

Department of Home Missions and Church Extension

1426 U.B. Building
Dayton 2, Ohio

Established, February 5, 1947 (in tradition of Commission on Rural Life of United Brethren Church)

Director:
- Dr. B. H. Cain, April 9, 1947-

METHODIST

The Methodist Church

Department of Rural Work

Board of Home Missions and Church Extension
150 Fifth Avenue
New York 11, N.Y.

Established 1916 (The Methodist Episcopal, North)

Secretaries:
- Dr. Paul L. Vogt, 1917-1926
- Dr. Mark A. Dawber, 1925-1937
- Rev. Aaron H. Rapking, 1937-1941
- Rev. A. J. Walton, 1941-1945
- Dr. Elliott L. Fisher, 1946-1949
- Dr. Glenn F. Sanford, 1949-

Board of Missions
Woman's Division of Christian Service
150 Fifth Avenue
New York 11, N.Y.

Established, 1940 (following unification)

Executive Secretaries:
- Mrs. J. W. Downs, 1940-1944
- Mrs. Noreen Dunn Tatum, 1944-1946
- Mrs. Marjorie Minkler Morris, 1947-1955
- Miss Cornelia Russell, 1955-

LUTHERAN

National Lutheran Council

Rural Church Program

Division of American Missions

327 South LaSalle Street
Chicago 4, Illinois

Established, 1945

Secretary:
- Dr. E. W. Mueller, 1945-

United Lutheran

Department of Survey and Research added to this department in 1946.

Board of American Missions
United Lutheran Church
231 Madison Avenue
New York 16, N.Y.

Established 1926

Secretaries:
- Dr. H. Torry Walker, 1926-1931
- Dr. A. M. Knudsen, 1932-1946
- Dr. Karl S. Henry, 1946-

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PRESBYTERIAN

Cumberland Presbyterian Church

Rural Church Department
Board of Missions and Evangelism
112 Cherry Street
McKenzie, Tennessee

Established, 1950

Secretaries:
Rev. Hubert Morrow, 1950-1952
Rev. E. Colvin Baird, 1952-
(one-third time)

Presbyterian Church in the United States

Town and Country Church Department
Division of Home Missions
Board of Church Extension
341-B Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta 5, Georgia

Established, 1925

Secretaries:
Dr. Henry Woods McLaughlin, 1925-1946
Dr. James M. Carr, 1949-

Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.

Department of Town and Country Church
Board of National Missions
156 Fifth Avenue
New York 10, N.Y.

Department established, 1910

Secretaries:
Dr. Warren H. Wilson, 1909-1937
Dr. Henry S. Randolph, 1937-

United Presbyterian Church of North America

Town and Country Department
Board of American Missions
702 Publication Building
Pittsburgh 22, Pennsylvania

Established, 1950

Secretary:
Dr. George P. Kerr, 1950-

A Prayer of Dedication

• Thou hast been most merciful unto us, O Lord; the seasons have been short of rain, the yield of the earth has been less than we hoped for, our fields and pastures are dry and thirsty; yet thou hast given us all that we needed and enough to share with others. We bring these gifts to thee, Lord of Light and Life, and humbly dedicate them for the advancement of thy Kingdom in the hearts of men. Accept these gifts, and bless them, and the faith by which we give; and reconsecrate our lives to thy service. In Jesus' name. *Amen.*

The Gift and Growth of Unity

RALPH D. HYSLOP

• A young minister, acting as sole leader of a large congregation in the interim between the resignation of the senior minister and the call of his successor, decided to carry out to the letter the suggestions of his denomination's Commission on Worship and Evangelism. Newly arrived from graduate studies at Union Theological Seminary, he added to his unguarded enthusiasm for denominational programs an ardent Biblical and theological concern. Although his denominational office had perhaps not hoped that any minister would receive its suggestion for the planning of worship and life of the church in the period between Easter and Pentecost quite so seriously, this man confronted his church council at its meeting prior to the opening of Lent with the proposal that the entire life of the church following Easter be related to the great succeeding festival of Pentecost. His case was presented with what he believed to be sound theological buttressing and a certain modest eloquence in which he was careful not to take undue pride.

Dismay

But he was not prepared for the immediate response of this man, a substantial citizen and leading layman of a large and influential church. "Pentecost!" the man snorted. "That's what that queer bunch at the edge of town calls themselves, and we'll have none of that nonsense in this church. We will now receive the report of the Building and Grounds Committee."

There was nothing in the curriculum of the three seminaries which he had attended which prepared him for the shock and dismay of that moment. He knew there was an answer, but he feared he had already given it with no apparent effect. Pentecost after all did happen and, like all events in Christian history, its happening is continuous and contemporary with ourselves. Its first occasion was surrounded by tokens of surprise and disturbance. Perhaps, after all, the council chairman was not entirely mistaken in identifying Pentecost with the sole manifestation in that community of a gift of the Holy Spirit marked by surprising but tangible results. It may have been substantial and responsible men, not unlike the chairman of the church council, who sneered at the believers gathered in that first Pentecost, "They are brim full of new wine."

There are many striking aspects of the event described in the second chapter of the book of Acts, but perhaps the most moving in its suggestiveness is that strange possession of power to speak, and to be understood in many tongues. In the luminous translation by James Moffatt, following the impressive catalog of countries and races represented in this gathering, these words appear: "We hear these men talking of the triumphs of God in our own languages." Presumably those who built the Tower of Babel were speaking of their own triumphs when God confounded them by the confusion of tongues. At Pentecost the one language of power descends from God who alone can give to men utterances appropriate to His works.

It is reasonable to assume that this "talking of the triumphs of God" finds its common expression in the words which Peter addressed to the skeptical witnesses of this event. Peter's declaration is clear and simple. God's gift is Christ present in power with His people. The triumphs of God are known and shared with all. The sermon ends, "For the promise is meant for you and for your children and for all who are far off." But the sermon ends truly not in words but in action. "About 3,000 souls were brought in that day. They devoted themselves to the instructions given by the apostles and to fellowship, breaking bread, and praying together. Awe fell on everyone."

Gift and Commission

We who are the fruit of Pentecost continued in the history of the Church are accustomed to saying that our unity is not our achievement but God's gift. Surely this is true, but just as surely it is partial truth and the more dangerous because it is incomplete. The unity of the followers of Christ is a gift, but it is a gift accompanied by a commission. Those who are able to talk with the conviction of experience of the triumphs of God are those who also declare to all men "the promise is meant for you and for your children." To claim fellowship with God is to bear the divine constraint to declare Him and His power to all mankind. No form of Christian unity is authentic which does not fill to overflowing with the vitality of the Christian witness. It is that very overflowing which is the sure sign to men that God is active and that we are bound unto His holy and imperious will.

There should be little need for warning concerning the peril of claiming divine gifts without full commitment to divine commission. Biblical thought is shot through with this terrible reminder that the true God is a jealous God. He will have no other gods before Him, not even the god we claim as surety of our faith and its unity. For if we claim Him and are not wholly claimed by His cause, we serve not Him but our claim upon Him and our satisfaction and security in it. That this peril confronts the contemporary movement toward a more visible realization of our unity no sober observer could deny. The ecumenical movement was born in the expansion of the Christian mission. It was nurtured by the faith and the dedication of those who prayed with the Master that all might be one in order that the world should believe in Him and in God who sent Him. The validity of the movement rests in the extent to which the right and responsibility of Christian evangelism is established throughout the Christian community as first among the tasks of the Church.

Unity does not consist in private or corporate nurture of special tokens of divine favor. These tokens are manifold and varied, but all alike are barren when conceived as possessions to be cherished rather than powers to be conferred. Nor does unity live and grow in debate, however learned, concerning the historic or contemporary formulations of Christian doctrine. The noblest of the creeds are confessions drawn from the living commitment of men who knew themselves to be the ministers, not the masters, of the divine Grace.

Who can read the writings of Athanasius or follow the career of this oft-banished bishop without realizing that the greatest of the Nicene defenders labored solely that the power of the one God and His redeeming Son might be known in its fullness to all who are yet far off? It is to declare the mystery and majesty of God's action in history that we form our testimonies, certain that they must fail to express, as they will by the divine providence, fail to limit His Freedom and our dependence.

The Ecumenical Heresy

Christian unity does not consist even in ecumenical studies. There is exhibited here the danger of a new heresy in Christianity: the ecumenical heresy. Like all heresies, this one is an exaggeration of part of the truth at the expense of the whole. It is certainly true that an understanding of the variety and validity of the forms and traditions of historic Christian churches may serve to moderate our tendency to claim divine sanction for one alone. It would surely be loss, not gain, however, if this moderation were to find expression in a suave and confident relativism by means of which we offer our better understanding of each other as substitute for a humbling and painful awareness of a common failure to know and to do the will of God.

No mighty force moves through the world solely because the churches naming Christ as God and Savior come to know each other better. It is not even clear that the issuing of this better understanding in organic union of churches is proof that the power of the Gospel here becomes visible to men. We dare not, I think, interpret the divine gift of unity as entailing only that form of accord which results from mutual acceptance of historic orders and administrations of divided Christendom. The economical heresy may well be the conviction that the reunion of the Church is the supreme good in the very moment in history when the supreme need is for its rebirth. The most tempting aspect of this heresy is the suggestion that re-union and re-birth are the same. They are not.

For the gift of unity is God's gift of Christ as Savior of the world. As He is for all men, so all who acknowledge Him as Lord and proclaim him as Savior are for all men: committed to all, bound in service to all. The growth of unity is not a plan nor an achievement of the churches. As He who created the Church remains through His indwelling of it the Church's only Lord, so the oneness of His people is and remains the manifestation of His Lordship. But all are one with us who are one with Him, and He is, by divine act, made one with all mankind.

The tokens of His saving work in and through the Church in our world are more than sufficient signs of our true unity. It is our peril, and that of the world's, that we seek to limit or to control this work which is the constant source and invigoration of our common life. With humility and discretion we may indeed seek to apply those tests of the Spirit which Paul derived from his oneness with the living Christ. Those who speak with tongues must prove that their speaking edifies and empowers the whole congregation of Christ. This includes theologians who expound the truths of the End as well as ecstatic groups who proclaim the beginning of a new life.

Those who find in historic liturgy and classic creed the channels of God's love and grace must demonstrate that these channels are open to all men, as the gift of God is to all men. Those who cherish their liberties must yield them in allegiance to Him whose authority alone establishes and maintains our free-

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dom to be and to believe. Those who love and serve the movement for Christian unity must surrender that movement and its power and prestige to a greater Lord than is conceived by any institution in history, even the institution of the Church. Our God gave us to be one with His Son who died for us, not only that we might recognize each other as brothers, but that in union with our Master we might truly know Him who sent Christ into the world. We do not, in fact, know each other rightly unless we know that we are those for whom Christ died, dwelling among men for whom He also died, who know Him not. The promise of our unity is not fulfilled in us but through us, in those to whom we minister in Christ's name.

The Redemption of the World

Here is the true meaning of ecumenical studies and of the Program of Advanced Religious Studies. In the world setting of the Christian community, there is the reminder that every Congregation of the people of Christ is a member of the Church Universal. There is also the temptation to assume that the realization of this membership in the one Church is the fulfillment of Christ's prayer "that all may be one." But let us never forget that every Christian congregation has a mission to that world in which it is set, as well as true participation in the whole Church of Jesus Christ. In the fulfillment of that mission, unity grows. We are one with Christ in the redemption of the world, not in the achievement of a better ordering of our own ecclesiastical affairs. Ecumenical studies relate primarily to the tasks given the whole Church by its Lord, and to evidences that He is the Lord of the Church provided by the witness of the Church to the mighty truth that He is also Lord of the world.

All who live and work in this fellowship of the Program of Advanced Religious Studies have accepted the commission to preach the Gospel to all mankind. From many traditions and out of many cultures, we are made one solely by the power of Christ which provides in each of our lives the signs by which we recognize and acknowledge in each other a single devotion to Him. To Him, not as the possession of our churches and the badge of their authenticity, but to Him as the troubler of the complacency of Christendom we owe our allegiance and our unity. If this unity be authentic, then it will grow in ways that may surprise and disturb.

For the growth of that unity which is the gift of God is always a growth in Grace. The more unity we receive, the more surely we deny our right and warrant to chart the course and to set the bounds of the Church of Christ. Through prayer and study, in mutual dependence upon and grateful fellowship with the living Christ, we undergo painful change. There is a loss of certainty, a sharp awareness of our frightening insularity, a common confession of our weakness in the world. We who have so often thrilled with pride in the existence and achievements of the Church throughout the world, discover as never before its misery, its isolation from the world, which is its real and appalling disunity, its separation from the broken body of its Lord. And with Peter's hearers on the day of Pentecost, we cry, "Brothers, what are we to do?"

The answer comes, "Repent." And is it not true that this repentance is easier for those who hear for the first time the words that follow, "Let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins"? How shall we who are already baptized, whose sins have already been remitted, whose place is already found in the succession of the saints —how shall we repent?

It is the testimony of the Church ever renewed in history that this repentance is impossible save by grace. All our instincts of self-preservation as churchmen rally to prevent so shattering a confession of our sin. It is not possible for men, by the exercise of will, to admit that their very righteousness is an offense to the only Righteous One. Yet, the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by Peter to those who heard him, on the condition of their repentance, is poured out unconditionally upon the Church, making its repentance possible. The sign of the Church's rebirth is then confession; the proof of its unity with its Lord is the admission that it too is broken and bereft of power. The wonder of Pentecost is the acceptance of Christ as Lord—first by those who already claim the sanction of His Cross for their purposes but will not live under its judgment, and then by those who can know and believe God's purpose of redemption only when they hear it proclaimed by men whom the Holy Spirit has both judged and redeemed.

It is thus in the spirit of confession and hope that we testify this day not to a new power or wisdom but to the ancient promise fulfilled in our time. In the first descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church, "awe fell on everyone, and many wonders and signs were performed by the apostles." So it must be when the power of God breaks through into the life of man. There are wonders and signs because this is God's work in us, and He is able to do all things abundantly, even to create and to re-create that unity which enables the Christian fellowship to be in the world as Christ also is in the world, to suffer, to serve, and to save not itself but mankind.

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